

COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Governor
October 4, 2001

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NEW MENTAL RETARDATION WAIVER APPROVED

- Additional Funding for Community Mental Retardation Services -

RICHMOND -- Governor Jim Gilmore announced today that beginning October 10, Virginia will institute a new home and community based program to assist individuals with mental retardation. Additionally, the Governor announced his approval for \$3.5 million this fiscal year to fund 150 additional slots for individuals who need mental retardation waiver services. The "MR Waiver," as it is known, waives certain eligibility requirements for Medicaid funds and enables families to care for their loved ones with mental retardation at home as an alternative to sending them to a state institution.

"This is a very important step in fulfilling my promise to reform the Mental Retardation Waiver program," said Governor Gilmore. "The new plan places decision making exactly where it should be...with individuals and their families, in partnership with their local Community Services Boards. More Virginians will be served, communities will have greater influence and families will have more choices."

Today's announcement follows a doubling of the money spent on MR waiver services by the Gilmore administration since 1998, from \$88.5 million to \$172.4 million in fiscal year 2001. The number of people served by the MR waiver has increased as well, from 3,100 individuals in 1998 to over 5,300 today.

Last October, Governor Gilmore established a Task Force comprised of families, advocates, Community Services Board staff, and state agency representatives to develop the new mental retardation waiver plan and submit it through Secretary of Health and Human Resources Louis F. Rossiter, to the federal government.

"The involvement of consumers, advocates, and families with our local and state agency staff was the key in getting the new program approved," Secretary Rossiter said. "The plan builds on the strengths of the two state agencies to manage the services and to get them to consumers and families who are in need at a reasonable pace."

Under the new plan, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services will be the operations manager of the waiver program. Community Services Boards (CSBs) will manage the waiting lists for services, within criteria set by the Department of Medical Assistance Services. The

CSBs will continue to provide case management and local service coordination. Families will have greater choices in hiring individuals who can come into their homes to provide services such as personal assistance and respite and companion care. Families and consumers will have more choices of services and providers based on their individual preferences. The Department of Medical Assistance Services will continue to be responsible for the management of the federal and state funding of the program, utilization review, system development, and promulgation of policy and communication with the federal Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). In FY 2000, all state funding for MR Waiver services was transferred to the DMAS budget, achieving a consistent budgetary approach to all waiver programs in Virginia.

Of the 150 additional waiver slots to be managed by the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, 39 will be dedicated to people who are ready to be discharged from state mental retardation training centers, 40 will be reserved for emergency situations and 71 will be allocated to the community services boards.

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